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ABSTRACT

School climates at 12 day care centers in Sweden were compared to investigate effects of center climates on children's social and emotional behavior. Observations and interviews conducted at the day care centers revealed differences in center climates related to child-rearing patterns, patterns of interaction, the distribution of power, and in children's social behavior. At centers in which caregivers exhibited "present-focused" working methods, children were frequently involved in free play, planned activities did not always take place as planned, adults were rather passive in their relationship to children, and children were seen often wandering around aimlessly. Children attending such centers also played less with each other and teased and rejected each other more than at "future-focused" centers. At centers in which caregivers used "future-focused" working methods, a clear daily plan and many planned activities were exhibited. Adults activated children who had nothing to do and required children to take responsibility for many situations. Consequently, children felt they were needed. Children played together more at these centers than they did at "present-focused" centers. (Examples of free play and planned activities at "present-focused" and "future-focused" centers are included.) (RH)

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STUDIES OF DAY CARE CENTER CLIMATE AND ITS EFFECT ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

Paper presented at the symposium
Care - rearing - education
Färöhus 15 - 17 of april 1985

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Studies of Day Care Center Climate and its Effect on Children's Social and Emotional Behavior

State regulated day care in Sweden has expanded greatly in the past decade. In 1982 there were more than 200 000 children enrolled in day care centers and children's leisure centers (for 7 - 10 year-olds). The day care centers are often composed of two to four sections with 15 - 20 children per section for children over three years and about 10 children per section for younger children. The usual age-groups are six months to three years, and three to seven years or one to ten years. The staff density is high - at many day care centers one staff member per five children for ages over three years and one staff member per 2.5 children for the youngest children. Swedish day care centers are the responsibility of the local governments and are to some extent nationally regulated. The goal for the day care is two-fold. Its purpose is to take care of the children while parents work or study as well as to provide a stimulating educational environment. The content of these two goals is regulated by national curriculum plans.

Day care centers can be studied from many different perspectives. We have chosen to regard the day care center as a complete unit, in which the social and psychological influence on the children and the adults can be understood by studying the climate of the day care center.

The purpose of this project has been to describe and analyse existing climates at day care centers and their effects on the children's social and emotional behaviour. As a starting point for the organization of the study, the following model was used, showing the different factors that can contribute to the creation of a day care center climate.

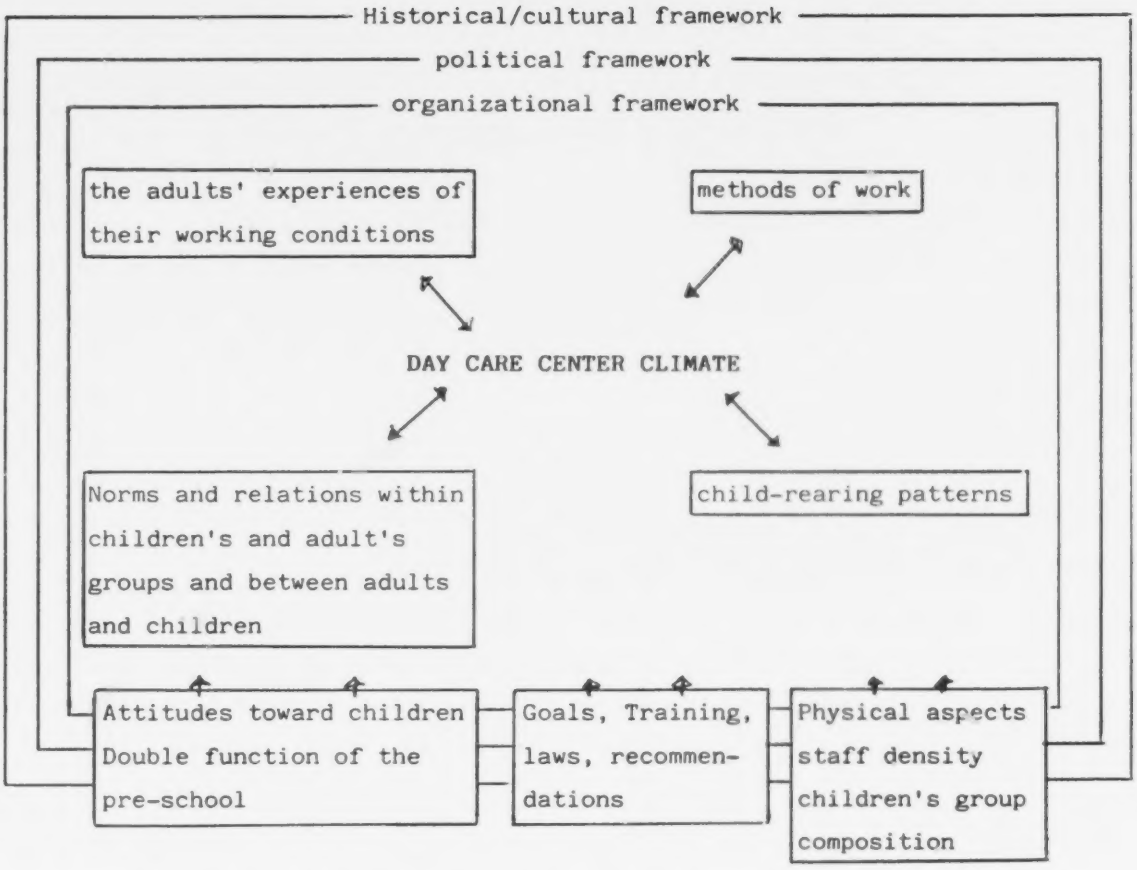

Figure 1: The climate project's model of what determines the climate of the day care center.

In conclusion we found that the climate of a day care center is effected by a number of inter-related factors which can be expressed by the staff's attitudes to child-rearing and their ability to function in a work team. This in turn is a function of institutional variables, such as the degree of autonomy in the process of decision making, the composition and size of the day care center etc. Even personal variables such as individual attitudes to child-rearing, individual experiences in training, the ability to work together and the presence of the staff's mutual goals all effects the climate of the day care center.

Our survey is based upon key factors of day care center climate, namely the education attitudes and action patterns of the staff and the working atmosphere among staff members. We have related these factors to how the children function socially and emotionally at different day care centers.

Two central conceptions for child-rearing patterns are "present-focused" and "future-focused" methods which are based on Schaefer's ideas on child-rearing i two dimensions, the degree of control and the degree of emotional warmth (Schaefer, E. 1959). In the day care centers where the dominate pattern can be characterized as "future-focused" the children are to a great extent allowed to try out their own solutions to problems without having to ask for permission from the adults. They are allowed to independently do certain jobs of importance for everyone at the pre-school. Here the children are also encouraged to go ahead with jobs, games and types of play that they are not quite able to do. At the same time they receive support and help from the adults in practicing the things they are not yet able to do. In the day care centers where the "present-focused" patterns dominate, the adults work in a different way in their relations to the children. Activities and the whole situation at the day care center are arranged for the children. Daily activity is completely adopted to them and their present stage of development, and if something is too difficult (for the children) the adults do it for them. In this climate the children are not expected to be able to independently do different jobs within the pre-school.

Effectuation of the Study

The study has been carried out mainly in five phases according to the following:

PURPOSE	METHOD
1. To find day care centers in which the staff had contrasting methods of work. (Ekholm, B., Ekholm, B., Hedin, A. 1982)	Questionnaire on how day care staff usually act and would like to act in certain working situation, where the choices are on a scale from present-focused working methods to future-focused. The form was given to all day care center staff in a middle-sized borough.

2. To choose four day care centers with present-focused working methods and four with working methods representative of the borough's most common pattern.	Analysis of the answers given on the forms and selection by compiling the staff's answers on how they usually act and how they would like to act at each day care center. In the section certain structural background variables have been taken into consideration (Ekholm, B., Ekholm, M., Hedin, A. 1983)
3. To describe the climate of the center, that is the methods of work of the 12 day care centers, the relationships between the adults and the children, between the children themselves and the adults attitudes towards their working environment.	Intensive studies of each day care center for 2 weeks by means of observations, interviews with the adults and picture-interview forms with the children.
4. To describe the situation for mainstreamed children who have been placed in the 12 day care centers.	Special studies of a mainstream child and a matched "ordinary" child in each of the day care centers.
5. To see the degree of stabilty in the staff's opinion of their methods of work (Ekholm, B., Ekholm, M., Hedin, A. 1984)	A new questionnaire with the same questions and to the same group a year later.

In the survey form (phase 1) the day care center staff members were presented with ten situation descriptions of everyday events at a day care center. For each of the situations they were asked to choose one of four action alternatives for how they "usually" act and how they "would like to" act.

The result of the form on the staff's methods of work showed that the borough's day care centers remained within a relatively limited area of the theoretical distribution of survey variables and a tendency towards

present-focused working methods was apparent. This tendency was even more apparent in the answers to the question "how you usually act" than "how you would like to act". The answers to the latter questions tended to be more future-focused. A compilation of the answers for each day care center resulted in the following distribution pattern. In the diagram below the 12 day care centers chosen for the intensive study are indicated with an X.

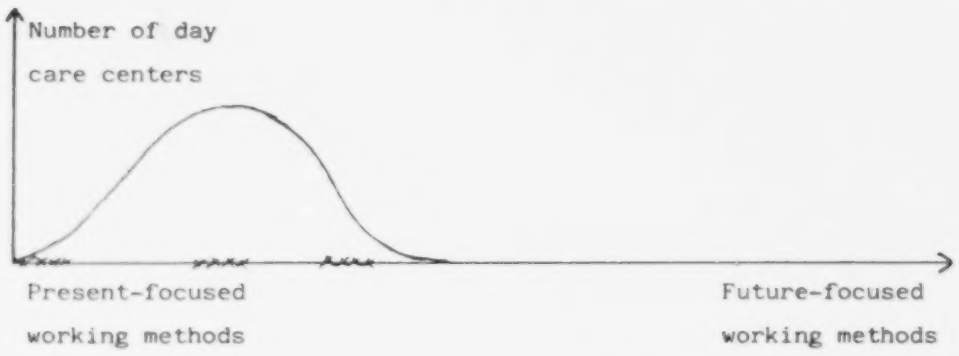

Figure 2: Approximate positions for the 12 chosen day care centers within an approximate distribution of the 104 day care centers on a continuum which runs from present-focused to future-focused methods of work.

In our analysis of the questionnaire we also compared the staff's attitudes towards child-rearing to a number of background variables such as training, age, if they had children of their own, length of employment within child care, type of day care center. Of the 919 answers that were analyzed, it turned out that only one background variable was of significance for child-rearing attitudes, that of age. The older the staff members were, the more future-focused they were (Jönsson, 1983).

In order to determine the degree of stability in the child-rearing attitudes, a new questionnaire was given to the whole staff group one year later. This test showed no or extremely small differences in child-rearing attitudes between the two tests. The stability of child-rearing attitudes was in other words extensive. We also examined the relationship between staff-mobility in each day care center and the stability of attitudes but found no such relationship.

The intensive study

In the intensive study each of the 12 day care centers was visited for a period of two weeks, during which activity was studied by means of systematic observations on an all day basis for seven days. During the rest of the period all the adults (n = 99) at the day care centers were interviewed and all the children between the ages of four and seven (n = 145) answered a picture-form, the purpose of which was to determine the children's experiences of their day care time.

The method of observation

The goal for the observations was to obtain as complete a picture as possible of what happens during a day for children aged 3 - 7. Regular rutines such as meals, outside activity and assemblies have been observed regularly. At the day care centers where school-children have been in the same groups as younger children, the school-children have only been observed on the occasions on which they were together with the pre-schoolers. At the day care centers with several sections, approximately the same number of observations per type of situation in each of the sections have been made. In computor processing, however, the day care sections have not been kept separate.

The observations have taken place between 8.30 am and 3 pm during seven days. At the beginning of each day the periods of observation have been divided between the day care centers different localities with the exeption of the above mentioned regular rutines. We have tried to achieve an even distribution of observations in all the rooms and at all periods of time. When a chosen room happened to be empty it was replaced by the next one in turn. The use of the rooms of the day care centers was often such that it made this replacement system necessary.

The observations were constructed according to a code system in which the observer did not make a decision until after each ten-minute period as to whether the period was dominated by co-operation or non-cooperation as well as if independence or dependence had dominated. The observer was then able to register his total impressions as to the adults' as well as the children's action within the chosen main category. It was also possible to code both main categories (for exemple co-operation behaviour and behaviour that impeded co-operation) if it was impossible to differentiate a dominant

pattern or if the types of behaviour dominated half the time each. Our ambition was however to chose one main category. The percented agreement was measured regularly during the study and the average was .81. (Hollenbeck, A 1978, p. 7).

Similarities and Differences in Day Care Climate

The twelve studied day care centers were similar to a great extent. All of the day care centers had access to good localities and outdoor areas. The rooms were used in a similar way and the day care centers had in common the fact that they seldom used all the rooms fully. Contacts with the outside world were also similar, making trips to the woods, the swimming pool, the library and doing the grocery shopping with the children. In none of the activities did the parents take part.

Also where inner activities are concerned, there were certain common cultural characteristics, even if the twelve intensively studied day care centers were in many ways twelve different "personalities". There is a similar division of day into three main activities: free play, rutine activities and different types of guided activity (such as reading groups and assemblies). Rutines such as meals and cloak room situations take up about 1/4 of the time at all the day care centers. Many of the day care centers have bought their materials themselves but even here great similarities between the day care centers can be observed. About the same material have been bought and they are placed in about the same way in the rooms and on easily accessible shelves. In all the day care centers adults were closeby the children in most situations. Children are found everywhere in rather small groups. There were seldom groups of more than 10 children. In the interviews with the adults similar fundamental ideas were expressed on the goals for the activities. The goals had mostly to do with general care, wanting the children to feel secure and for them to be independent. The staff had trouble defining their goals in concrete terms and were to a great degree unaware of how their own conduct effected the children. At all the day care centers it was the adults who had the main influence on planning and activities. Adults do the everyday jobs that need to be done. Nowhere did the children have any real responsibility for any of the activities.

Where inter-action between adults and children are concerned the day care centers were similar to a certain degree. The adults many times take the

initiative and are active with opinions and suggestions. They often help the children. The tone between adults and children is generally friendly. The adults accept most things and arguments seldom occur.

Even in the children's groups at the twelve day care centers one can see certain similarities. Real conflicts are for exemple rare. Just as the adults are active so are the children very active in taking different types of initiatives. At all the day care centers the children spend much time at creative and motor-skill activities.

Differences between present-focused and future-focused day care centers

Despite the fact that one can find many general similarities in the day care centers and in their activities where factors that can effect their climate are concerned, differences can also be pointed out that constitute essential factors in the forming of different types of climate. These differences are assigned mainly to differences in methods of work, that is child-rearing patterns, different patterns of interaction and the distribution of power. There are also differences in the children's social behaviour.

In the diagram below we would like to show the distinct differences we have found between day care centers with a more present-focused child-rearing pattern and those whose child-rearing pattern is characterized as more future-focused. There are even other differences between the 12 day care centers but for which there is no clear pattern.

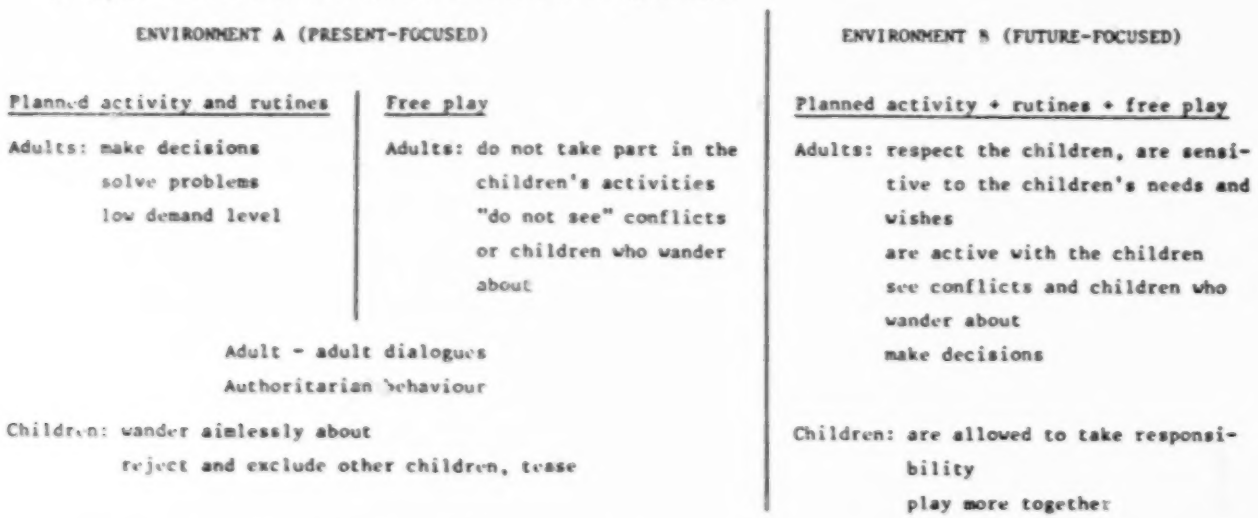
ENVIRONMENT A (PRESENT-FOCUSED)
Planned activity and rutines
Adults: make decisions
solve problems
low demand level
Free play
Adults: do not take part in the children's activities
"do not see" conflicts or children who wander about
Adult - adult dialogues
Authoritarian behaviour
Children: wander aimlessly about
reject and exclude other children, tease
ENVIRONMENT B (FUTURE-FOCUSED)
Planned activity + rutines + free play
Adults: respect the children, are sensitive to the children's needs and wishes
are active with the children
see conflicts and children who wander about
make decisions
Children: are allowed to take responsibility
play more together

Figure 3: A summery of the differences between the present-focused and the future-focused child-rearing climate

At the present-focused day care centers the children have more free play and the planned activities do not always take place as planned. As shown in the above diagram, the adults at the present-focused day care centers have a divided behaviour pattern towards the children. That is they command and make the decisions during rutine situations and assemblies, but not at all during free play. Since the adults steer the activities, they are the ones who decide what takes place and in what way. Since the adults completely take responsibility for the situation, they also adapt things to the children, that is they help them with various practical jobs and solve their problems. This in turn means that the adults make low demands on the children, they do not for example follow up on how the children carry out their "responsibilities".

During free play the adults at the present-focused day care centers are rather passive in their relationships to the children. They sit beside them and watch them, without taking part in their activities themselves. This means that the adults often do not "see" what happens, do not acknowledge conflicts or children who are just wandering around not having found anything particular to do.

In common for both free play and planned activity is the fact that the adults are often preoccupied by talking to other adults. Since the adults thus sometimes "see", sometimes "do not see", sometimes intervene, sometimes not, their behaviour is difficult for the children to predict. When the adults intervene and reprimand the children it is done with authoritive orders and recommendations without explanations or time for the children themselves to think about how they should act.

Many children at the present-focused day care centers cannot always handle a lot of free play, which leads to the fact that one here more often sees children wandering around aimlessly. The children also play less with each other and tease and reject each other more.

At the future-focused day care center, the adults have the same behaviour pattern during planned activity and free play alike. At these day care centers there is a clear plan for the day and there are more planned activities. Most often one adult works alone with a group of children. The adults also take part more in the children's activities, talk to and cooperate with them. Despite the fact that the adults have a more fixed framework for the day's planning the children are allowed to influence much

within this framwork. The adults show respect for the children by listening to them and by being sensitive to the children's opinions, needs and wishes. The adults are also more observant of what happens in the children's group and intervene when something starts to go wrong. They activate the children who are wandering around without anything to do. When they reprimand the children they explain very thouroughly their reasons for doing so. The adults stimulate the children to try new things and to think for themselves. They gradually increase the level of demands on the children and take the children's "responsibilities" seriously.

The children at the future-focused day care centers are expected to take responsibility for many situations, and feel that they are needed. The children play more together at these day care centers.

In the following we would like to exemplify how reality for the children can be at day care centers representing the two types of child-rearing patterns described above. We have chosen to give examples of rearing situations that contain elements of care and education and that are found at all day care centers. We would like to point out that these situations are repeated systematically within each day care center and therefore constitute the children's daily life.

The examples are taken from planned activity and free play. The day care center Enen (The Juniper) has a future-focused child-rearing pattern and the day care center Lönnen (The Maple) a present-focused child-rearing pattern.

Planned activity, Enen

At 8.30 every morning everyone gathers for a morning assembly. All ten children take part together with two adults. Each week there is a theme that is talked about at the beginning of the assembly. An example of such a theme is "Winter sports and what one might think of in relation to these". During the assembly children and adults alike are active and talk, the children have many opinions. They talk about what you should wear when you go skiing, what to keep in mind when sledging on a hill. At the morning assembly they usually sing, play song games or regular games. Often a teacher will play the guitar and everyone sings along. Both the children and the teachers choose the songs. Sometimes the children have a suggestion, sometimes the adults. The same is true in the choice of games that

end up the assembly. One day Per suggests they play "Pomperipossa", everyone joins in. The teachers crawl around on the floor with the children, everyone laughs, jokes and has fun. A few times the game is ended when one of the children suggests they have free play instead.

Planned activity, Lönnen

Every day at about 9 o'clock 8 -10 children, that is those who have arrived so far, are brought to sit on the floor of one of the large rooms. One of the adults leads the assembly. Sometimes one or two adults also sit in and listen. The assembly do not have any certain theme, different things are done each time. Sometimes they do not do anything special other than eat fruit and talk small-talk. Once the children were brought to the painting room. The teachers had made preparations for flower-making (coltsfoot, one of the first flowers to come in the spring in Sweden). On the table there is a model of how the coltsfoot will look. The idea is that all ten children will make identical coltsfoots, just like the model. The teachers work hard with the production of flowers and talk to each other while doing so. The children are not allowed to do very much themselves - not even the six year olds. The teachers draw round circles om the yellow paper and the children cut them out. The teachers put the pre-cut stalks on the yellow flowers and the children put them in a lump of clay. The youngest children do not get to do anything themselves, the teacher makes the whole flower, "so that it looks nice when they take it home.", she says.

Free play, Enen

Indoors the children are building a hut during part of the free play. Often there are 5 - 6 children in the cushion room. There is seldom a teacher present. Sometimes there are conflicts between the children, they wreck each others huts or fight with each other. In a few cases they settle things themselves. Linda says, "You are not supposed to fight because it hurts, stop it". The children try to educate each other. Another time Pelle and Jakob are kicking each other and it hurts. A teacher who hears comes and asks, "Why are you doing that? How does it feel? What should you do instead of fighting?" Pelle answers "Talk to each other, say I am sorry". During free play the teacher also encourages the children to do different things, play games, such as "UNO". The teachers always play the games with the children and teach them the rules. When the children do well they receive praise. The teachers talk and joke with the children while they

play. One day a teacher presents an idea. She says that when she was little she liked to play store. "Shall you and I play store?" "Yes", answer some of the children. The children and the teacher start getting out material to make things and start deciding what to sell. The whole time the teacher and the children make decisions together. When they get tired they decide to continue the next day. Lisa says, "We had better clean up this mess now.".

Free play, Lönnen

The children are often in the cushion room, sometimes one but often several, sometimes as many as eight at a time. There is hardly ever any teacher in the cushion room with them. Sometimes they play role games, they are animals who are being hunted or animals in cages. Often they jump and run around without any particular purpose. Many times they bicker and tease each other. Sometimes it develops into a fight. Often a couple of boys or girls gang up on and are mean to a third child. Such as the time when Olle wispers to Anders. Both boys go over and tease Johan. They kick him and pull his clothes. Johan becomes unhappy and starts to cry. Olle and Anders leave. Another time Johan tries to be a friend by together with Anders finding a scapegoat. Johan says, "I will kick his bottom", Anders goes along with it and they start teasing again.

Another time when there are eight children in the cushion room two of the older children, Peter and Jacob take the lead. They decide where the other children are to "live", which animals they will be and what they have to do. When Pelle states where he wants to be, Peter quiets him by saying "get out of the hut, I decide when you get to come in". "Everybody who cannot keep quiet has to get out", adds Jacob. Only those who obey are allowed to play. Later Peter is heard saying to little Fredrik "Come give me a kiss". When Fredrik does not want to Peter is offended and angry. He trips Fredrik who falls down and cries. None of the teachers see what happens in the cusion room, they are talking to each other in the kitchen and the children are alone.

In conclusion... The daily life that the future-focused child-rearing pattern offers (exemplified by the day care center Enen) is regarded by us as a favourable environment for development of the child. Our study gives no simple explanations as to why the climate at one day care center is present-focused while that of another - with the same outer conditions - is future-focused. But even if reasons are complex and it is still yet unclear

which factors are of the most importance, we feel that it is important to strive at making the adults at the day care centers conscious of the consequences that a present-focused and a future-focused attitude can have for the children's lives. It is also important to make the staff aware of the fact that they are carrying out child-rearing during the whole day in all situations and activities, not only in the situations that simply are described as educational. Regardless of the content of that which occupies them, the adults will effect the children's development socially, emotionally and cognitively due to their own attitudes and conduct.